

Why We Write a Comprehensive Plan

To put it simply, we are looking out for the place we call home. In the April issue of Lake Views we discussed what we do at the Lake County Planning Commission and introduced the four steps to develop a comprehensive plan through an open participatory process. This edition discusses steps 1 and 2.

1 Where Are We Now?

Thinking regionally while focusing on local issues - Our planning philosophy starts with thinking regionally about how the cities, villages and townships in Lake County are impacted by the land use and trends of communities beyond its borders. Our focus is local when we survey residents about their opinion of the community. Among the topics considered are the range of housing options available, creating walkable neighborhoods, respecting and reinforcing community character and a sense of place while preserving farmland and open space. Those who live, work, and own businesses in the community have a role in charting the future.

To continue to answer the question **Where Are We Now?**, the information gathering process begins by identifying options and issues in the following areas:

- The **demographics element** describes attributes of the township population, how it has changed through the years, and how it may change in the future.
- The **land use element** describes the role of the built environment on the township, how land is being used, and the importance of creating and maintaining a unique sense of place.
- The **transportation element** describes the transportation system in the township; not just considering motor vehicles, but also bicycles and pedestrians.
- The **housing element** describes home ownership and tenure trends, and addresses challenges such as affordable housing.
- The **public facilities element** describes all public land uses – public safety facilities, schools, parks and open spaces – and discusses future needs.
- The **utilities element** describes the role that utilities play in shaping the built environment of the township.
- The **economic development element** describes the business environment of the township, and policies intended to maintain a diverse tax base and reduce the tax burden on residents, while preserving rural character.
- The **natural resources element** describes the features of the township built, not by man, but by nature, and ways to protect those gifts in the face of population growth.

2 Where Are We Going?

Community Involvement - Very often, as in the case(s) of the *Leroy Township Plan (2005)*, *Painesville Township Plan (2007)*, *Madison Township Comprehensive Plan (2009)* and the *Madison Village Comprehensive Plan (2009)*, collecting and interpreting data begins with a survey of the citizens to find out what they like and dislike about their community. This data can be quantified and analyzed to help form goals, objectives and action items in subsequent portions of the planning process. Public meetings are a second option for public input. These meetings should be held during evening hours at a convenient location to facilitate as much attendance as possible. To encourage participation, meeting notices can be included in utility mailings, posted on local websites and community television stations, and announced in community mailings.

Communities will also survey the business community to better understand their needs as they relate to future public services. In other instances, personal interviews of key stakeholders will yield a tremendous amount of information about the community (i.e. Development Directors, Community Engineer, Senior Citizen Director, Recreation Director).

Regardless of the method, community involvement and buy-in is critical to the long-term value of the plan.